Saleem Abdelnour; the Pioneer from Mosul

Naseer AbdulNour*

Introduction:

In the course of writing a book about my family, "*ABDULNOUR Family Book: People and History*," I never imagined that I would find any information about my great-great-uncle, Saleem AbdulAhad AbdulNour, after he left the city of Mosul, Iraq during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. While our family knew he immigrated and lived with his family in America and knew the name of his only daughter is Ruth, who was in correspondence with her cousins in Mosul. Apart of that we didn't know anything else about them. When I slowly started to find information about Saleem's and Ruth's families and Saleem's three nephews who also immigrated to America at a different time, I really didn't know what to do with the information except add it in my book. However, after reading a paper about the first Iraqi immigrants to the United States, I decided to write this paper about Saleem's life in the US. The text is a mix of research, oral history, and a multi-generational family life story. The transliteration of the family surname has been written in many different English versions and the spelling has changed many times over the years. For clarity I will only use two versions, the version that Saleem used, "Abdelnour", and the version I use for my surname, "AbdulNour."

Research:

Saleem's story started in Mosul, in present-day Iraq. It was a mid-size city and the capital of Mosul Vilayat (Ottoman governorate) in the north of Iraq which within a few decades was ruled by three different regimes. First, it was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 to 1918, until the British army defeated the Ottomans and entered Mosul in peace time, at the waning days of World War I, after the Armistice of Mudros 1918. After that, Mosul became part of the newly formed Kingdom of Iraq under the British mandate. Finally, when the British mandate ended in 1932, Mosul was part of the newly independent Iraqi Kingdom which eventually became a republic in 1958.

Saleem AbdulNour was born in 1866 in Mosul to a prominent Syriac Orthodox Christian family in Mosul during the rule of the Ottoman Empire [(1)]. Saleem was the second boy for Abdulahad AbdulNour and Gallo Archelides Rassam who had two other sons; the elder Abdulaziz born on 1850 who became a judge during the Ottoman rule [(2)] and the younger, Razouqi, who died prematurely young. They had one daughter, Sussan who later married Mr. Houdi Bethoun, a merchant and landowner in Mosul [(1)]. Saleem's father and many of his family members were merchants and landowners, many of whom were involved in the civic and governmental affairs in Mosul as councillors or held government positions [(1)]. They utilized their farmlands around Mosul to breed horses and livestock and trade them and agricultural products and export them to many parts in the Ottoman Empire, Europe and India [(1)].

Saleem's father, uncles, both grandfathers, and many members of his family were involved in the affairs of the Syriac Orthodox Christian Church in Mosul during a period of significant schisms throughout the 19th century [(1)].

While we don't know any details about Saleem's early life in Mosul, he most likely received his elementary education at home together with his sibling and cousins, then attended the Mor Toma Syriac Orthodox Church primary school, then the Dominican missionary school in Mosul following the footsteps of his elder brother, Abdulaziz [(1)]. We know that he left Mosul after a dispute with his parents and travelled on a raft (kalek) going down the Tigris River to Baghdad. In Baghdad he boarded a commercial British steamships which were operating on the Tigris River between Baghdad and Basra since 1861, intending to travel to Persia (modern day Iran) but ended up immigrating to the United States after talking to someone on that steamer [(3)]. He entered the U.S. in 1888 (Fig. 1)**,** although his naturalization certificate lists 1890 as his arrival year. Regardless of which date is accurate, he is considered the first immigrant from Mosul to settle in the United States, as his arrival predates that of Salim Barson, who arrived in 1892 [(4)]. This would make him one of the earliest Syriac Orthodox people who settled in the U.S.

However, there is no information about how he reached the U.S., especially given the existence of an Ottoman government decree prohibiting emigration to countries outside the Empire. It appears this policy primarily applied to laborers and individuals with low skills, while merchants and artisans were allowed to leave. This restriction was eventually lifted in 1898 [(5)].

In 1896, Saleem became a U.S. citizen (Fig. 2), and his listed address was in Fall River, MA. Fall River, where Saleem started living in 1892, is a town about one hour southeast of Boston, MA, and approximately half an hour east of Providence, RI. Two of Saleem's nephews, Bashir and Abdallah AbdulNour were listed living in Providence at different times. Both of them arrived in the U.S. in 1904. Bashir is documented living in Providence in 1910 [(6)] and Abdallah in 1913 [(7)] but it is highly likely that they lived there simultaneously, as both were listed at the same address in U.S. census forms [(6)]. It is also possible that their brother, Daoud, who arrived to the U.S. at the same year, lived there at the same time, although no further information about him exists beyond his arrival record. The two cities were close enough to travel and visit at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, there was a Syriac Orthodox Church in Providence, RI, although there is no available information indicating whether Saleem or his nephews attended services there.

Most of Saleem's life remains undocumented until 1892, when he was listed as a fruit seller in Fall River [(8)], likely delivering his goods using horse-driven carts, as he owned four horses for this purpose [(3)]. In 1898, he started working as a commission merchant in Fall River but we don't know what kind of merchandise he was dealing with [(9)] and in 1903, he had obtained a license to operate as an auctioneer [(10)].

In 1911, Saleem founded S. Abdelnour Co., a wholesale company with a capital of $20,000. The company specialized in fruit, produce, and groceries and Saleem served as the president of this company [(11)]. In 1923, he appears to have purchased a building located on the corner of Borden St. and Fifth St. [(12)]. The company's address was 173 Borden St. and the business remained in operation at least until 1927 [(13)]. This building and another building he owned on Borden St. were demolished in the 1960's by the city to make way for new road construction.

Saleem's wholesale business prospered until he received a shipment of rotten peaches from a merchant in Georgia, resulting in a loss of approximately $40,000. His efforts to recover the loss were unsuccessful, which significantly harmed the company and ultimately forced him to shut it down [(3)]. It is possible that Saleem's long-standing involvement with agricultural products was influenced by his family's background, which owned farmland in villages around Mosul**,** and marketed and exporting its different agricultural products [(1)].

Saleem met his future wife, Emma Miles, at her bakery store in Fall River and they got married in 1900 [(14)]. Emma emigrated from Canada with her family in 1880 [(6)] when she was about four years old according to their grandson, Bradford Lindsey. Her family was of Irish descent [(3)]. Saleem's only child, Ruth, was born in 1911. The possibility of Saleem staying in contact with his nephews who were living in Providence is supported by the fact that his family in Mosul knew about Saleem's live, family, and his daughter Ruth likely from his nephew, Abdallah, who returned to live in Mosul in the late 1920's and died in Mosul in 1942 [(1)].

After Saleem's fruit and grocery wholesale business closed, it appears that he started a new business in 1932 which was a wholesale bakery business located at 95 Borden St. [(15)], which may have specialized in crackers [(16)]. By 1942, the same location was listed as a cookie store business under the ownership of Saleem and Emma Abdelnour [(17)]. This business seems to have continued running until Emma joined Ruth's family when they moved from Massachusetts to Connecticut when Bradford was about six years old [(3)].

At some point, Saleem was involved in a serious car accident during a snowstorm, which left him badly injured and never fully recovered [(3)]. Saleem Abdelnour died on September 21, 1942 [(18)] at age of 72 years and was survived by his wife Emma Abdelnour and his daughter, Ruth, and her family.

Based on the available sources about Saleem Abdelnour and his life in his new country, he appears to have been a prosperous businessman who was well integrated into the business and civic life in his adopted country. He was actively engaged in the legal system, both as a plaintiff and a defendant in court cases [(19)] [(20)] [(21)] [(22)]. He was engaged in political and civic life, supported political campaigns [(23)], and was a member of different societies like Shriners [(3)] and Masons [(24)] (Fig. 3). Over the years, Saleem started multiple businesses, owned

several properties, and lived in different houses in Fall River [25]. He also used few different aliases as it is shown in Fall River City Directories from 1892 to 1943.

Ruth went to study at Rutgers University and was involved in many social and civic activities while she was a student there [26]. She graduated in 1932 and she married David Lindsey in New Jersey in 1935. Their first child, Bradford, was born in 1940 in Needham, MA, just two years before his grandfather, Saleem, died.

In the late 1930s or early 1940s, Ruth's husband, David Lindsey, was reportedly in discussions with one of Ruth's cousins in Iraq about securing a position with the Iraqi government in Baghdad, but the idea was eventually dropped [3]. Based on the timing and context, it's likely that cousin was Dr. Abdulahad AbdulNour [27] who was a very well connected and influential Christian figure in Iraq who served twice as a deputy of Mosul in the Iraqi Parliament. Another possibility would be his younger brother, Thabit AbdulNour [28], who held high ranking positions in the Iraqi government and was also a two times member of Iraqi parliament.

Ruth and David had two more children, John who was born in 1943 and is retired in FL now and Leila who was born in 1945 and died in 1996. While writing this final sentence, it occurred to me that in 1935, a well-known Egyptian writer, Zaki Amin, wrote a novel titled "*Leila*" that referenced to Dr. Abdulahad AbdulNour which may have inspired Ruth to name her daughter Leila [1].

Last Words:

The information in this paragraph is from Saleem's grandson, Bradford Lindsey. In 1946, Ruth and her family moved to Trumbull, Connecticut for David's job at Bridge Brass Co. In Connecticut, Ruth took additional university courses so she could become an elementary school teacher. In 1950, Emma Abdelnour died of cancer. Ruth was a skilled bridge player, talented cook, and baked delicious chocolate chips and Christmas cookies, skills she likely learned from her mother. She learned from her father how to pick the best fruit and vegetables. When Ruth's husband took early retirement, they moved to Fort Myers, Florida. When David died in 1987, she relocated to Tampa, Florida. to be close to her son, Bradford and his wife, Julie. Ruth lived in the Tampa area until her death in 2010 at the age of 99. Her ashes were sent to Fort Myers to be buried next to her husband David in Fort Myers cemetery.

While working on my book and searching for information about the relatives who migrated to the U.S. long time ago, I went to the local library and searched the census records for Saleem Abdelnour and his daughter Ruth which were the only clues I had to begin with. I was more than elated after finding this wealth of information about them and about Emma, Bradford, John, Leila, Bashir, Abdullah, and Daoud. I found phone numbers and an email address for Bradford and left messages and sent emails. My phone messages were not

returned and the emails bounced back. My last ditch effort came after attending a presentation by a professional local genealogist at the same local library and after I told her about my failed efforts, she suggested I send a letter by mail if I know the address. I searched again and I found Julie Lindsay, Bradford's wife's address and I sent the letter. Suddenly after two weeks, I received an email from Bradford and Julie - and as they say, the rest is history.

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Special thanks to Dr. Aziz AbdulNour for proof reading a draft of this paper

Bibliographical Sources

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(2) Abdulaziz AbdulNour bio https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdulaziz_AbdulNour

(3) Bradford A. Lindsey, Saleem AbdulNour grandson. Written personal communication 2024

(4) Al-Kattan, Omar Abdulghafor (2018). *First Iraqi Immigrants to the United States* (1893-1909)

(5) Bali, Rifat N. (2008), *From Anatolia to the New World: The First Anatolian Immigrants to America*. Balgamis, A. Deniz and Karpat, Kemal H. ed. (2008) *Turkish Migration to the United States; From Ottoman Times to the Present*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin

(6) US census 19210, 1920, 1930

(7) *Directory of Assyrian People of the United States and Canada 1913*, P. 12, Yeran Press, Boston, MA.

(8) Fall River City Directory 1892

(9) Fall River Business Directory 1898.

(10) Fall River Daily Evening News Tuesday, June 2, 1903.

(11) The Evening Herald, Saturday, October 14, 1911.

(12) The Evening Herald, Fall River, Thursday, September 6, 1923.

(13) The Fall River City Directory, January 1, 1927, Page 249

(14) Fall River Marriages Registry 1900 (15) Fall River Business Directory 1932

(16) Fall River Business Directory 1936 (17) Fall River City Directory 1942

[18] Saleem AbdulNour death record 1942

[19] The Evening Herald, Friday June 17, 1904

[20] The Fall River Daily Evening News, Monday September 30, 1907

[21] The Evening Herald, Monday September 11, 1911

[22] The Fall River Daily Globe, Friday April 11, 1902

[23] The Evening Herald Wednesday November 23, 1910. Saleem was a signer on a petition to nominate Israel Brayton as a ward alderman in Fall River, MA

[24] 1908 Fall River Mason Membership card (Fig. 2)

[25] Fall River Historical Society Report

[26] Ruth was a member of the League of Women Voters.

[27] Dr. Abdulahad AbdulNour bio https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdulahad_AbdulNour

[28] Thabit AbdulNour bio https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thabit_AbdulNour

Saleem Abdelnour

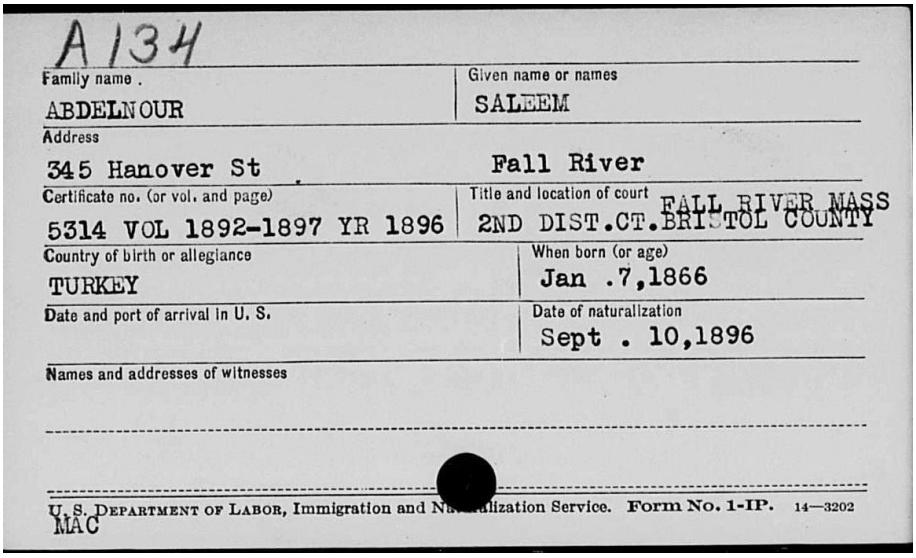
In the 1930 United States Federal Census

Detail | Source

Name:	Saleem Abdelnour
Birth Year:	abt 1866
Gender:	Male
Race:	White
Age in 1930:	64
Birthplace:	Iraq
Marital Status:	Married
Relation to Head of House:	Head
Home in 1930:	Fall River, Bristol, Massachusetts, USA
Map of Home:	Fall River, Bristol, Massachusetts
Street Address:	Grove Street
Ward of City:	8
Block:	139
House Number:	93
Dwelling Number:	145
Family Number:	262
Home Owned or Rented:	Owned
Home Value:	7, 000
Radio Set:	No
Lives on Farm:	No
Age at First Marriage:	33
Attended School:	No
Able to Read and Write:	Yes
Father's Birthplace:	Iraq
Mother's Birthplace:	Iraq
Language Spoken:	Arabic
Immigration Year:	1888
Naturalization:	Naturalized
Able to Speak English:	Yes
Occupation:	Proprietor
Industry:	Produce Co
Class of Worker:	Wage or salary worker
Employment:	No

Household Members	Age	Relationship
Saleem Abdelnour	**64**	**Head**
Emma Abdelnour	54	Wife
Ruth Abdelnour	19	Daughter

Fig. 1 - Saleem Abdelnour 1930 US Census information including his arrival date in 1888



A 134

Family name .
ABDELNOUR

Given name or names
SALEEM

Address
345 Hanover St Fall River

Certificate no. (or vol. and page)
5314 VOL 1892-1897 YR 1896

Title and location of court
2ND DIST.CT.BRISTOL COUNTY FALL RIVER MASS

Country of birth or allegiance
TURKEY

When born (or age)
Jan .7,1866

Date and port of arrival in U. S.

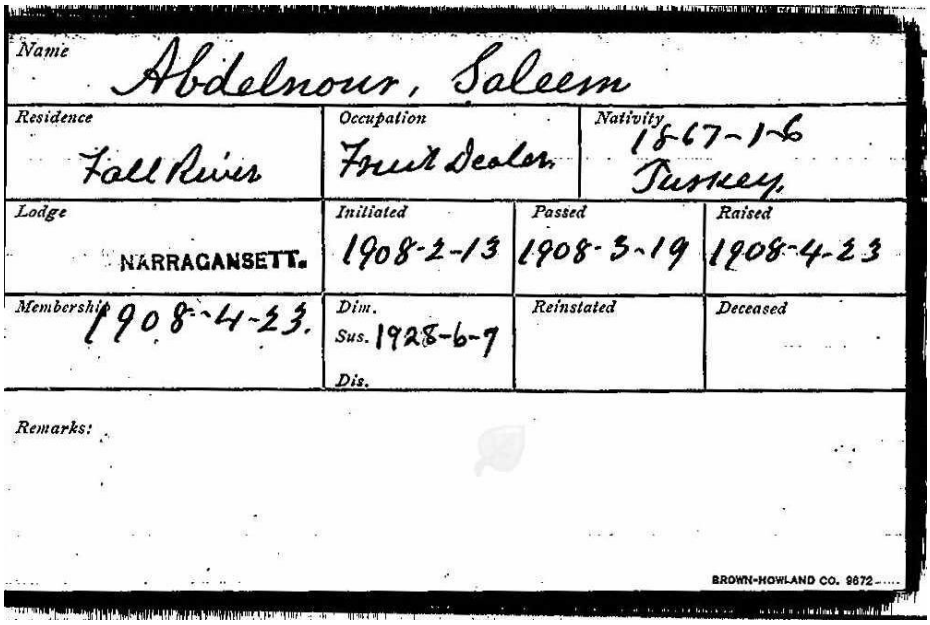
Date of naturalization
Sept . 10,1896

Names and addresses of witnesses

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Form No. 1-IP. 14—3202

MAC

Fig. 2 - Saleem Abdelnour Naturalization Card



Name Abdelnour, Saleem

Residence	Occupation	Nativity
Fall River	Fruit Dealer	1867-1-6 Turkey

Lodge	Initiated	Passed	Raised
NARRAGANSETT.	1908-2-13	1908-3-19	1908-4-23

Membership	Dim. Sus. Dis.	Reinstated	Deceased
1908-4-23.	1928-6-7		

Remarks:

BROWN-HOWLAND CO. 9672

Fig. 3 - Saleem Abdelnour Mason Society membership card